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ABSTRACT

Mexican children from Cosomaloapan (male dominated) and Tehuantepec (female dominated) were asked to draw "the person you'd like to be." In Cosomaloapan, 96% of the females and 93% of the males drew their own sex. In Tehuantepec, 76% of the males and 71% of the females drew theirs. There were highly significant between-city differences for both male and female groups. Results were not in keeping with the model of greater percentage of self-sex drawings from the dominant sex in each city. Findings are discussed in terms of Cosomaloapan's sex role rigidity, and Tehuantepec's more fluid framework. (Author)

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Children's "Ideal Self"—Which Sex?

Drawings from Two Mexican Subcultures

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Children's "Ideal Self"--Which Sex?

Drawings from Two Mexican Subcultures

Human figure drawings by school children from the Mexican cities of Cosomaloapan (male dominated) and Tehuantepec (female dominated) provide a basis for contrasting the nature of sexual identity in these subculturers. In this study, drawings of the "person you'd like to be" were used to examine differences in identity among members of the dominant and the dominated sex in each city.

Sex of the figure in the Draw-A-Person (DAP) task has been widely investigated. Machover (1949) claimed "evidence of some degree of sexual inversion" was present in all individuals drawing opposite sex figures when instructed to draw a person. Findings supporting Machover's supposition that sex of the drawing indicates the subject's sexual identification were reviewed by Fellows and Cebus (1969). Heinrich and Triebe (1972) compiled the results of 19 studies using the DAP, reporting that 83% of the male and 78% of the female subjects drew figures of their own sex (self sex figures). Subjects were between 5 and 18, with most samples from the American culture. The large population upon which percentages were based suggests their representative nature. Butler and Marcuse (1959) attributed the greater percentage of self sex drawings to the dominance of the male sex in this culture. Their interpretation raises the question of whether females in a female dominated culture would draw self sex figures with greater frequency than would the males.

The cities of Cosmaloapan and Tehuantepec are highly similar in many respects,[1] making it possible to consider differences in the children's assignment of perferred sex to the different status of the sexes. Both cities have populations of nearly 17,000, both are heavily Catholic, as is all of Mexico. Both have tropical climates, luxuriant vegetation, and agriculturally based economies. Located on opposite sides of a narrow isthmus in southern Mexico, both cities are an hour inland from the sea. Neither place boasts attractions which would coax the tourist to linger, and affect changes in community life. For entertainment, residents of these cities patronize movie theaters and bars, particularly during the weekend. Marriage (formal or common law) is usually accomplished by late teens; the typical family has between four and five children. Cosomaloapan's average daily wage is slightly higher than that of Tehuantepec, but market prices in Cosomaloapan are correspondingly higher.

As is evident from Octovio Paz's (1961) exploration of the Mexican mentality from an insider's perspective, the sex role pattern of Tehuantepec is the exception, that of Cosomaloapan the rule. Within the value schema of machismo (which translates roughly into male virility) women are perceived as instruments, repositories for the values of men. Women's inferiority is considered to be constitutional in nature, residing "in their sex,

their submissiveness, which is a wound that never heals" (p. 30). The sexual act is described as a process in which the "chingon," the male, rips open the "chindinga," the violated female, who is defenseless against the exterior world. However, in its pure form, passivity is idealized, and the passive woman transformed into a goddess. "Woman" is hence the object of both deprecation and idealization.

Most women in Cosomaloapan have lifestyles corresponding to the Spanish proverb, "A woman's place is in the home with a broken leg." Except for some 5% of the women who work (the vast majority of these are single) and another 2% who attend community center classes (many of which emphasize domestic arts), the women of Cosomaloapan rarely leave the house. There they are occupied with childcare and homemaking, activities assigned low status. No matter when one walks about Cosmaloapan, most of those on the street are men. The few women almost invariably are in the presence of men, and appear to be doing household errands.

In Tehuantepec (together with the neighboring city of Juichitan and several small villages nearby), there exists a society run by women for women. There is no local explanation for this anomoly other than "It's always been this way." Though the Tehuanas, women of Tehuantepec, are responsible for childcare and homemaking, nearly all have an occupational involvement outside the home. Many work in the market, which is run almost exclusively by women. Unlike women in other parts of Mexico, the Tehuanas own lands, houses, and valuable jewelry; their husbands and male relatives have no authority over this property. The women are politically as well as economically active. And in Tehuantepec, it is the men who are less visible. They work in fields outside the city, returning at the end of the day.

There are parallel contrasts in the folklore of the two subcultures. Covorrubias (1946) noted the popular belief in Tehuantepec that their women are taller than the men. He claimed this was not fact, but testified to the imposing appearance and personal style of the Tehuanas. Draped in richly embroidered blouses and ankle length skirts, often balancing heavy baskets on their heads, they are majestic figures. Covorrubias observed them to be uninhibited, free-wheeling ". . . as can readily be seen in the manner in which women clap their hands to attract the attention of someone a distance away, yelling at one another at the top of their lungs to close a business deal or ask a question" (p. 298). The men are portrayed as sullen and restrained. Only when under the influence of alcohol do the men reveal a "resentful and gnawing inferiority complex."

Covorrubias described a different human landscape in the Cosomaloapan region. There, "the women are dark and coquettish, soft and easy of manner, and they always wear flowers in their hair. The men are wiry, sunburned, with intense black eyes, high bridged noses, long sideburns, and bad teeth. They enjoy a perennial devil may care sense of humor . . . every man from the age of 10 upwards is clever at improvising verses which compliment a . . . girl . . ." (p. 11). However, these compliments are impersonal, as illustrated by the local poem:

I am of the general opinion
that for a man to have his fun
it's like this: if I loved you
I don't remember.
If I had you I forgot where
and if you really want to know
I don't even remember your name. (p. 11)

There are no comprehensive sociological studies of the regions. However, personal observations, conversations with city government officials, and Covorrubias's presentation of local color and custom in the two regions all support the premise that Cosomaloapan is male dominated, and Tehuantepec female dominated. From the Butler and Marcuse explanation (members of the dominant sex draw a greater percentage of self sex drawings than members of the dominated sex) it followed that males from Cosomaloapan and females from Tehuantepec would draw a higher percentage of self sex figures than females from Cosomaloapan and males from Tehuantepec. To emphasize the "ideal self" aspect of the Draw-A-Person task, the children were instructed to "Draw a picture of the person you'd like to be."

Method

Subjects were students enrolled in first through sixth grade classes of public schools in Cosomaloapan and Tehuantepec. Permission to enter the classrooms was granted by the school administrators, who also selected at random the particular class at each grade level that would participate. In these schools, there is no attempt to group children by intelligence, demonstrated proficiency, or any other factor, rendering all classes of a given grade essentially the same.

The children ranged in age from 5 through 16 (for Cosomaloapan $\bar{x}$ = 10.0 SD = 2.3, for Tehuantepec $\bar{x}$ = 10.3 SD = 2.4). The wide age range reflects some families' preferences for having two or more siblings begin school the same year, as well as the interruptions which sometimes occur in schooling. The sample was sparse at both ends of the age continuum. In Cosomaloapan, 57 males and 77 females participated in the study. In Tehuantepec, 110 males and 118 females participated.

Group administrations of the task took place in the school classrooms. Pencils and blank sheets of paper were provided. The children were instructed in Spanish to "Draw a picture of the person you'd like to be." Questions concerning the task received non-committal encouragement to "Do as you think best." The children were allowed as much time as necessary for task completion. Upon termination, each child was asked to designate the sex of the figure drawn.

Results

In Cosomaloapan, 96% of the females drew self sex figures as against 99% of the males. In Tehuantepec, 76% of the males drew self sex figures as against

71% of the females. There were highly significant differences between percentages of self sex figures in the two cities. This difference holds for both males ($z = 16.04$, $p < .001$) and females ($z = 11.22$, $P < .001$).

In both cities, members of the dominated sex drew a slightly greater percentage of self sex figures than did members of the dominant sex. Therefore, results were not in keeping with the model of greater percentage of self sex figures by members of the dominant sex.

In Cosomaloapan, instances of opposite sex figure drawings were limited to specific age groups. Among the males, 27% of the eight year olds and 25% of the nine year olds drew pictures of females. In the female group, 8% of the eight year olds and 20% of the eleven year olds drew males.

In Tehuantepec, opposite sex drawings occurred in nearly all age-sex groups. Among the male group, highest percentages of female figures occurred at ages 15 (60%), 10 (43%), and 6 (33%). Among female subjects, the highest percentages of opposite sex drawings were at ages 6 (71%), 12 (42%), and 11 (35%) respectively.

Discussion

Percentage of self sex drawings was significantly greater among both male and female subjects from Cosomaloapan than for corresponding Tehuantepec groups. Apparently there are determinants of sexual identification more basic than which sex which dominates within a culture. Perhaps the most parsimonious explanation of these results is the terms of "sex role rigidity vs. sex role fluidity." Cosomaloapan is a city characterized by the former. Women are wives and mothers; men the breadwinners, economic and political movers. It is appropriate for men to be active, assertive; for women to be passive, accepting. "Being a man" is so different from "being a woman" that there are few human common denominators. Psychological identification with the opposite sex would seem highly improbable within this cultural context.

Tehuantepec is a city characterized by sex role fluidity. There are many vocations in which both sexes have entry (i.e., business, government). Though women have their domains (the household, the market) and men theirs (the fields) even these realms have common experiential elements. For instance both agricultural labor and work in the market call for tremendous physical strength and stamina. In Tehuantepec, too, behavior is less sexually stereotyped. The women are characteristically aggressive and outgoing, but these qualities are not considered inappropriate in men. Perhaps such a cultural context allows for psychological identification with the opposite sex.

This interpretation leads to questioning Machover's supposition of sexual inversion among those drawing opposite sex figures. The possibility that an opposite sex drawing instead signifies experience reflecting sex role fluidity (and fluidity of sexual identity) is in keeping with findings of non-reliability when an opposite sex figure is drawn (Harmer and Kaplan, 1964).

Although the sample is not large enough for extensive developmental extrapolation, it is noted that the four city-sex groups show distinctive patterns with regard to percentage of self sex figures as a function of age. On this basis, it might be speculated that evolution of sex preference is determined in part by one's sex, in part by the nature of sex roles in the surrounding culture. The cities of Cosomaloapan and Tehuantepec could provide a useful field for exploration of questions related to the development of sexual identity.

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Footnotes

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[1]Information is based upon observations made by the author, and interviews with government officials from the respective cities.